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ABSTRACT

This book is the fourth in a series of six pocket-sized books written for career changers and laid-off workers. Each book is written at a 7th- to 10th-grade reading level and contains examples, hands-on self-discovery exercises, and step-by-step advice for a successful job search. This book provides a step-by-step process for succeeding in any interview. Chapter 1 describes what an interview is, its importance, and types of interviews. Chapter 2 details a 10-step success plan. The five steps before the interview are as follows: (1) research the company; (2) identify one's weaknesses; (3) prepare questions and answers; (4) practice for the interview; and (5) prepare for the meeting. These three steps at the interview are explained: wait for the interviewer, meet the interviewer, and handle the interview. The two steps after the interview are follow up and negotiate the offer. Chapter 3 offers some tips related to body language and answering and asking questions. Chapter 4 reviews the 10-step plan. Other contents include a bibliography of nine helpful books for job seekers and an index. (YLB)

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Job Interviews: 10 Steps to Success!

Pocket Job Series No. 4

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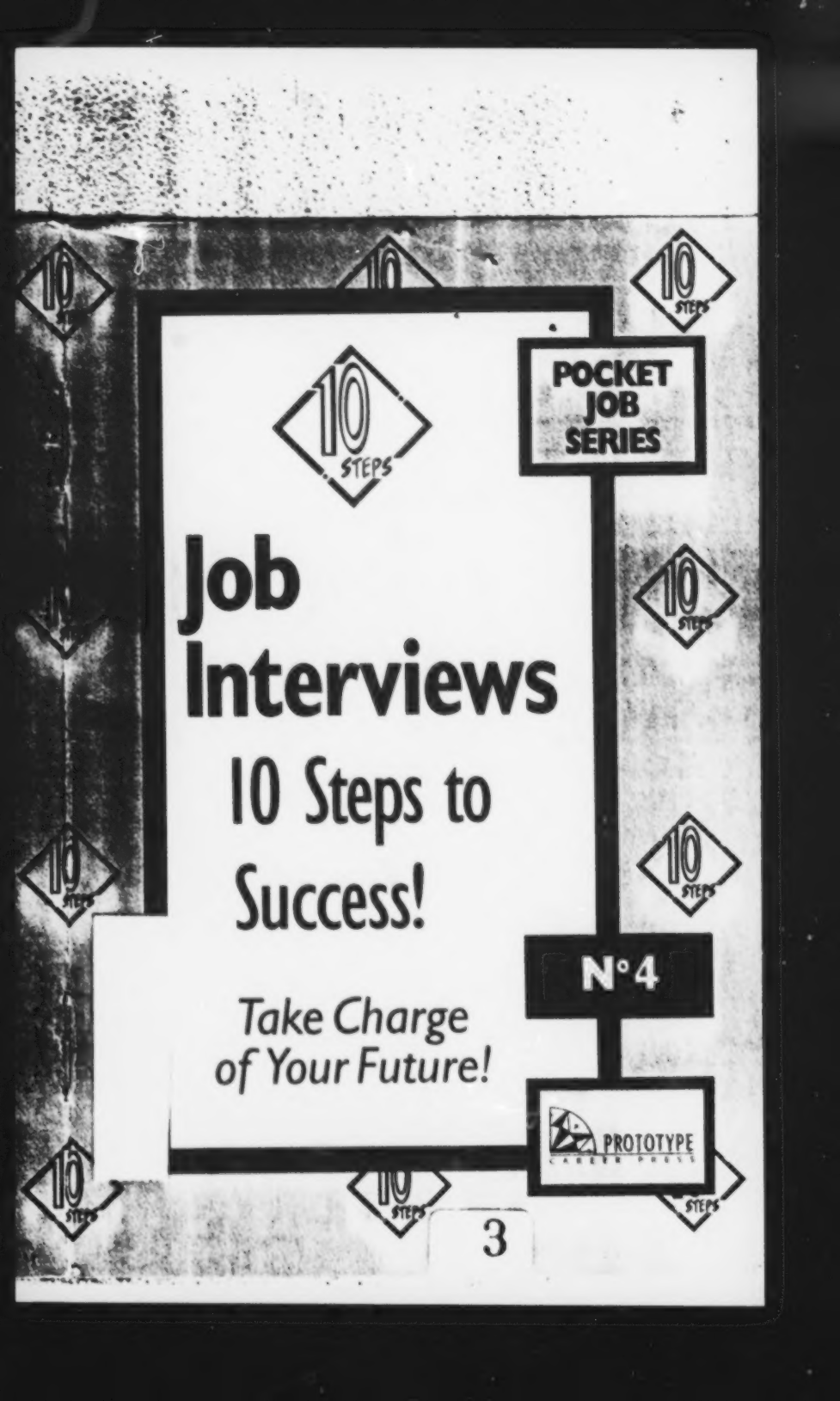
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Amy Lindgren is the founder and president of ProtoType Career Services, a 10-year-old firm specializing in laid-off workers and career-changers. ProtoType serves up to 2,000 people a year in workshops and individual sessions. Ms. Lindgren also trains other counselors in serving laid-off workers, and is the author of more than 300 published articles.

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INTRODUCTION

Job interviews. Not many people look forward to them — including the interviewer. And yet, the interview is the single most important step of the job search process. It's where you meet your future employer and co-workers, and where they decide if you'll fit the job. It's also where you decide if this is the company you want to work for.

Whether you like interviews or not, one thing is certain: you won't get a job without having an interview first. And your performance in the interview influences everything from your starting wage to future advancement. That's too important to leave to chance!

If you want to learn how to ace the interview every time, this is the book for you. Ready? Turn the page and let's get started.

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Chapter ONE

Putting It in Perspective

WHAT EXACTLY IS AN INTERVIEW?

The job interview is nothing more than a conversation between a job-seeker and a representative of the employer. Usually that representative is an employee of the company you want to work for — perhaps a manager or a person from the human resources department. But the interviewer could also be someone from an employment agency or contract house, hired by the company to find new employees.

In either case, the purpose of the meeting is the same. The interviewer wants to find out if you would make a good employee for the company. And you are trying to impress the interviewer while also deciding if this is a place you'd like to work. So both people have questions on their minds, and a deal they'd like to make.

In other words, this is a business meeting. Nothing more, and certainly nothing less.

That's comforting, because everyone has been in meetings before. You've probably been in a meeting to conduct business at a past job. Or at a store where you were purchasing something big, like an appliance or a car. Maybe you volunteer for your church and attend meetings for the youth leaders.

The point is, you've almost certainly been in a business meeting before, and interviews aren't much different. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that everyone in the room is an equal. You are at an equal level with the interviewer and vice versa. It's natural for you to be nervous — the interviewer may be nervous too! — but you have nothing to fear.

Also, since you contacted the company and asked to be interviewed, this is your business meeting. You're in charge of the agenda. That means it's up to you to see that certain information comes out. You'll have to

decide in advance what the most important points are, then watch for your chance to bring them into the conversation.

Of course, the interviewer thinks he or she is in charge of the interview, which is fine. As long as you achieve your goals for the meeting, it doesn't matter who's "in charge."

That brings up a very important point. Who has the most to lose in the job interview: you or the interviewer? The interviewer, of course. Think about it. If you don't get the job, what have you lost? Nothing! You didn't have the job when you went to the interview, and you didn't have a job when you left. That makes you even.

On the other hand, the interviewer does have a job, which he or she wants to keep. Hiring the wrong person would endanger that job. In fact, hiring the wrong person has shut down companies before.

The interviewer has a lot at stake, and you don't. That means you have the power in

this business meeting. Even though you want this job, you know there are other jobs out there. But this is (probably) the only company the interviewer works for. Picking the right employee will be very important to this person. That's good, because you're in a position to help them solve their problem.

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HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INTERVIEW?

In a nutshell, the interview is everything. It's where the employer makes a firm decision. In the first interview, the decision may be just to pass you along to the second interview. But then the decision will be made whether to hire you or not.

When is the decision made? Studies say interviewers often make up their minds within the first 15 minutes of the meeting. In fact, some experts believe the decision is made in the first 5 minutes!

If that's true, they're deciding on the basis of first impressions, not from your answers to the questions. And first impressions are physical — body language, posture, handshake, appearance, facial expression... that's what you need to practice, as much as the answers.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are many types of job interviews, some more common than others. It's a good idea to understand the different styles, since you won't know in advance what you might find.

One-on-One

This is the most common type of interview. The job seeker and the employer talk together, usually for 15 to 45 minutes. Often the interviewer will sit behind a desk or table, with the applicant on the other side. Your main strategy in this interview will be to form a bond with the interviewer and share the information that will help him or her decide to hire you.

Panel

In this situation, a group of three or more interviewers sit in a half-circle, or at a long table, and the job-seeker sits in front of them. Or everyone may be seated around a conference table, with the job-seeker at one end. The interviewers may all ask questions, or they may have a spokesperson. This type

of interview can be confusing and stressful. On the other hand, it gives you the chance to see many of the people you'd be working with. Your main strategy is to appear calm and avoid making mistakes. You also want to make eye contact with each person, since it may not be clear who is the decision-maker. Gather business cards from each person before you leave, or otherwise note their titles and the spelling of their names. You will need this information for your follow-up. It also helps during the interview if you know the names of the interviewers.

Group

In rare circumstances, you might be "interviewed" by a group. For example, a head librarian or school principal may be asked to appear before a group of students or library patrons and answer questions. This happens rarely, and only after one or two interviews have already taken place. Again, your strategy is to appear calm and avoid making mistakes.

Lunch

Sometimes the interviewer will invite a job applicant to a "lunch interview." This can be very awkward, but it can also tell you a lot about a potential employer. Order simple foods, don't drink alcohol, and don't talk with your mouth full! Use good manners and you'll be fine. But beware: don't get so relaxed that you share information you meant to keep to yourself.

Tour

This usually happens after the formal meeting, but it's still part of the interview. In this case, the applicant is brought around the plant or office and introduced to other workers. This is usually a very good sign. The interviewer likes you enough to spend time showing you around. The hardest part about a tour is getting peoples' names straight. Don't worry about it. Just concentrate on looking friendly and competent.

Informal or Unscheduled

This most commonly happens when a job seeker stops by with a resume or applica-

tion. The manager may decide to meet for a few minutes, even though the interview wasn't scheduled. You may have the advantage, since you knew you were stopping by and the manager didn't. In this situation, keep an eye on the clock. You've interrupted the manager's work, so be ready to leave after a few minutes. Always thank him or her for spending time with you.

Situational

This is really a style of interviewing, more than a type of interview. In this case, the interviewer asks the questions as if you already had the position. "What would you do if ..." or "Pretend you were supervising three workers and one of them ..." It helps if you think fast on your feet. If that's not easy for you, you need to practice. The trick in situational interviews is to appear confident but not cocky. Don't assume your way is the right way to do things. Instead, start your answer with: "One thing I might do..."

Stress

In this style, the interviewer does everything

possible to make you uncomfortable. Methods include staring at you, asking questions in a hostile way, giving you a bad chair to sit in, intentionally mispronouncing your name, etc. The idea is to create stress and see how you react. Luckily, these interviews are very rare. Being patient, respectful and slow to anger will help you get through this meeting. If you are physically uncomfortable, feel free to change the situation. Ask for a better chair, change positions so the sun is not in your eyes, etc.

No matter what type or style of interview you have, you can prepare yourself and do well. The 10 steps on the following pages will work under any circumstances. Once you master these steps, you'll look forward to your next interview!

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Chapter TWO

The 10-Step Plan

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

STEP 1. Researching the company

To do well in the interview, you must understand the company and its goals. Is this a place that prides itself on customer service? Or is "never late with a project" their motto? Perhaps it's a "mom and pop" store getting ready for its first expansion.

The more you know, the better your answers will be during the interview. See for yourself in the following example:

Interviewer: "I see from your resume that you've changed jobs a lot. You must really like variety."

1st Job Applicant: "Oh, I really do. I get bored easily and I like to keep learning. I'm looking forward to learning this job too."

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2nd Job Applicant: "Actually, it's not variety, so much as challenge that I'm looking for. I really prefer to stay in one company and grow with them. That's why I'm so interested in this job. Your new product line is going to create a lot of challenge and keep me busy. I've already got some ideas to share with you."

Which answer is better? The first job applicant sounded pretty good, but not really special. That's because she answered without having any research to guide her. She assumed from the question that the interviewer admired her varied background.

The second job applicant did much better because she knew from her research that this company values loyalty in its employees. In fact, she had read in a local newspaper article that the president liked "growing his own" talented workers. That's why she played down her background and stressed her desire to stay with one company. She made a strong finish by saying she already had ideas for the position.

To conduct good research, you need time and curiosity. A public library is also helpful, but you can start at home with just a telephone and a phone book.

First, look at the company's listing in the phone book. Is their ad bigger than everyone else's? Smaller? Are there any competitors? What is their main service? Are they listed in more than one category?

When you have learned everything you can, go ahead and call the company. Ask the person who answers what the company does. Then ask for literature, such as brochures, catalogs, or annual reports. You can explain that you're preparing for a job interview if you like. Or you can say you're just interested in learning more about the company. If the receptionist doesn't have time to answer your questions, ask to be transferred to someone in sales or public relations. These departments are created to talk to the public, so they'll be able to spare a few minutes.

If the company is a store, you may want to stop by and research by being a "customer."

Another way to research a company is to look up everything you can at the library, including newspaper articles and directory listings. The librarian can help you with this.

Have you asked your friends about this company yet? Word of mouth also can be an excellent research method. Tell people that you want to learn more about this company. You may be surprised by what they know.

Use the next pages to start recording things you find out. You'll need to add pages as your research continues.

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Research Information

Company: _____

Information	Source

Research Information

Company: _____

Information	Source
22	

Research Information

Company: _____

Information	Source

STEP 2. Identifying your weaknesses

When you know more about the company, you will also know more about the job you are applying for and the skills you need to do the job.

For example, if this company prides itself on how many people they serve a day, you know it will be very fast-paced. Are you a person who handles pressure well and works quickly? If not, you've discovered a weakness, at least in relation to this job.

Once you know your weaknesses, you need to decide what you're going to do about them. Then prepare yourself to discuss your weaknesses in the interview. What do you think of these two answers?

Interviewer: "You probably know that we have a very fast-paced workplace. It would be quite different from your last job — how would you handle that?"

1st Job Applicant: "I think I'd do ok. I'm pretty good at adjusting to new things. I'm eager to try, anyway."

2nd Job Applicant: "I've given that some thought. This job really is different from my last job, so I decided to try something like it to see how I would do. Last month I volunteered at the charity shop downtown, greeting customers, ringing up orders and answering questions. We served about 200 people that day with just four staff workers. I discovered that I'm pretty good at adjusting to new situations and thinking on my feet. I'm really looking forward to using those skills here."

The second applicant handled that well, didn't he? The interviewer knows he did his homework, and that he can probably handle the job. The first applicant was certainly willing to try, but he just wasn't as prepared to defend his weakness.

Now you try it. On the following page, write down your weaknesses, especially related to your job goal. When you have finished, use a separate piece of paper to begin preparing your answers to the questions that might come up about these weaknesses.

Personal Weakness Survey

Job goal/company: _____

My weaknesses for this job/company

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEP 3. Preparing your questions and answers

It's never good to be taken by surprise in an interview. To avoid that, you need to anticipate the questions you'll be asked and prepare answers for them. You'll also want to prepare questions of your own, to get the information you need about the job.

Let's start with the interviewer's questions. In addition to the most common questions (see Step 8), there will be several that are specific to this job. For example, an auto mechanic can expect to be asked about recent certifications, about specific repair problems, or even about new laws governing the industry. If you were that mechanic, you would want to prepare answers to questions like these. An unprepared applicant would seem unskilled and that's bad. Here's an example:

Interviewer: "It looks like you've had a lot of experience repairing newer cars. We're big on certifications in this shop — what training would you need to be certified?"

1st Job Applicant: "That's a good question. I really don't know. But I'm sure I would do alright."

2nd Job Applicant: "I was wondering the same thing, so I checked with the tech school where I got trained in the first place. They're still pulling my transcript together, but I should have an answer this week. Can I get back to you on that?"

Neither applicant had the answer the interviewer wanted, but the second applicant at least knew the question was coming. This job seeker sounds more prepared and serious about the job.

Now's a good time to think about the questions you can expect from an interviewer in your field. Use the next page to write down the questions. When you have finished, use a separate piece of paper to prepare your answers. Practice these answers until they come to you easily.

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Questions I should expect in my field

Industry/job goal: _____

Questions I will be asked

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Now think about the questions you have about the job or company. Even though salary is very important, don't concentrate on that yet. Instead, think of questions that deal with the work itself. For example, the mechanics might have asked:

- How many other mechanics work here?
- How often do you upgrade the equipment?
- Do you have plans to expand the business?
- I'd like to keep up my training. Will you help pay for classes, or allow flex-time so I can attend them?

Now you try it. Use the next page to write down some of the questions you might ask an employer. If you don't have an employer in mind, this can still be helpful for practice. Just remember to stay away from issues of salary, overtime, or benefits. These topics are handled a little differently; you'll read more about them in Steps 8 and 10 in this book.

Questions I might ask in an interview

Job title/company: _____

Questions

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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STEP 4. Practicing for the interview

Now that you know some of the questions to expect, and some of your answers, you're ready to practice. Have you been to an interview lately? If so, you'll know the benefit of practicing. There are a lot of things to keep track of in an interview, such as:

- appearance
- body language
- speaking loudly and clearly
- etiquette
- remembering names
- listening carefully
- picking up clues from the office
- answering and asking questions

Here's another way of looking at it. You wouldn't send a child into a softball game without practice — why would you do something as important as a job interview without practice?

The best way to practice is to find a friend or counselor to ask you questions. As you play the part of the applicant, you will get

smoother in your answers. You may even want to videotape yourself to check things like posture and eye contact.

Remember: You're practicing to gain confidence and get smoother. But you don't want to memorize answers and give canned speeches. Have your partner mix things up a bit to keep you off guard and keep your answers fresh.

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STEP 5. Preparing for the meeting

In addition to practicing the questions and answers, you need to prepare for the meeting itself. Do you know where the company is? Do you have reliable transportation? Are your interview clothes in good repair? Use the following checklist to be sure you've done everything to get ready.

- ___ Confirm time and place of interview
- ___ Wash and iron interview clothes, repair if necessary
- ___ Visit company 24 hours before; check for parking problems or traffic delays
- ___ Set out 4 or 5 resumes, letters of recommendation, references, practice application, work samples, notebook, pens and pencils, social security card, and directions to the company. Put everything in a briefcase or portfolio the night before the interview
- ___ Tell your references that a call may come from this company. Explain the job to them so they can respond appropriately to questions
- ___ Check your transportation method

___ Confirm day care or other arrangements
___ Get your hair trimmed, clip your nails, shine your shoes, etc.
___ Get a good night's sleep, dress carefully, check zippers and buttons, follow all the hygiene rules you learned as a child!
___ Plan to arrive 5 to 15 minutes early

A word about dressing for the interview

What should you wear to the interview? This question alone has inspired a half-dozen books. There's no one answer, but you can follow this rule of thumb to be safe:

DRESS A LITTLE BETTER THAN YOU WOULD ON THE JOB

That means mechanics can interview in new, clean jeans or corduroy pants and a clean, pressed, button-down shirt. Office staff can wear dress pants or a skirt with a button-down shirt or blouse, and a tie or understated jewelry.

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Salespeople and others in the public eye should dress up more, in suits or more formal dresses.

If you have doubts, go to the company the week before and look at what other workers are wearing. You don't need an appointment for this — just stop by and look around briefly.

Things to avoid include perfume or cologne, wild ties or extravagant jewelry, and clothing that fits poorly or is difficult to move in.

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AT THE INTERVIEW

STEP 6. Waiting for the interviewer

When you arrive at the building, stop at the rest room to check your appearance. Then check in with the receptionist or guard and tell them who you're there to see. They will probably offer you a seat or a cup of coffee. They may also ask you to complete an application. Accept the seat and the application, but turn down the cup of coffee. Too many awkward interview situations involve beverages!

Complete the application as well as you can, then attach your resume to it. You may want to pack some paper clips or a small stapler in your briefcase for this purpose. For more information on completing applications, see the book ***Resumes Etc.*** in the Pocket Job Series.

If the interviewer is late, use the time by looking around you for clues. Are the employees friendly-looking? Stressed-out?

Does the phone ring constantly? Are there any company reports in the lobby to look at? Don't pick up a magazine to read. This is a business meeting, not a trip to the dentist! Keep your mind on the purpose of the meeting.

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STEP 7. Meeting the interviewer
Most interviews consist of four parts:

- Greeting
- Warmup
- Question and Answer
- Closing

The greeting and warmup are part of meeting the interviewer. They are very important, as they set the tone for the rest of the interview. This is also the interviewer's first impression of you, and may determine whether you get the job.

Greeting — The greeting is short, but very important. It should contain these steps:

—Smile
—Make eye contact
—Give a firm handshake
—Say the interviewer's name
—Say your name (if the interviewer doesn't) Example: "Ms. Jones? I'm Martha Smith. I'm glad to meet you."

Remember that this is the interviewer's first impression of you. That's why the smile, eye contact and firm handshake are so important. Saying the interviewer's name helps you to remember it, and is polite. Saying your name helps the interviewer to remember it, and is also polite — especially if there are several applicants for the job.

Practice your greeting until it becomes second nature. Try it at church, with friends, wherever you can. This is very important!

Note: Don't hesitate to offer your hand to a man or a woman, regardless of your gender. This is business, not a social occasion. Use a firm, brief handshake. If your hands sweat, try spraying them with unscented antiperspirant shortly before the interview. (Practice this at home first, to make sure it really works for you!)

Warmup — A warmup is a brief, friendly comment that eases the tension between two strangers. Yes, you need a warmup! And yes, it's your responsibility. Remember, this is

your meeting. You're in charge of putting the other person at ease by being friendly. Try something positive and non-controversial, such as:

"I really like how sunny your offices are."

or

"This is a great old building. Is it turn-of-the-century?"

or

"What a great day. We've had terrific weather."

Avoid anything personal or negative, such as:

"Are those pictures of your wife?" (What if they aren't?)

or

"Blue is a terrific color on you!" (Who asked you?)

"What a lousy day this turned out to be." (Very whiny)

The warmup is important because it helps break the tension — which makes it easier for the interviewer to like you. That's very important, because of this rule of job search:

PEOPLE HIRE PEOPLE THEY LIKE

The opposite is even more true: People don't hire people they don't like. If the interviewer likes you, you're halfway there.

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STEP 8. Handling the interview

By now you're probably sitting in the interviewer's office or at a conference table somewhere. You've handed them your resume and they're getting ready to ask you questions. This leads to the last two parts of the interview: question and answer, and the closing.

Question and answer — The interviewer may use a prepared list of questions, or may use your resume as a guide. In addition to the questions that are specific to the job (which you prepared for in Step 4), most interviewers rely on some standard questions.

Following is a sample of such questions and the type of response you should use.

Tell me about yourself. This is by far the most common question asked in an interview. The employer is letting you "introduce" yourself while he or she gets settled.

Strategy: Prepare a 1-2 minute response

that explains your background and training related to this position. Use this time to mention things the employer needs to know, such as certificates or recent classes you've taken. Do not go into your family history, place of birth or hobbies!

What are your strengths? This question is straightforward — the employer is asking what your best points are.

Strategy: Give your strengths, as related to the job. Give an example if possible. Here's how two candidates answered this question. Which response is better?

1st Job Applicant: "I'm really good with people, and I learn fast." (This was ok, but not great.)

2nd Job Applicant: "I'm good with people and I learn fast. That's why customer service is such a good job for me. I'm able to handle peoples' complaints while I get the problem solved. My last job consisted of a lot of that." (Much better!)

What are your weaknesses? The employer really wants to know. They're also giving you a great opportunity to put your foot in your mouth.

Strategy: Relate your answer to the job. Put the weakness in a positive light, but don't insult the employer's intelligence.

1st Job Applicant: "I work too hard and that makes everyone else work hard. My co-workers hate that, but my bosses love it!" (Eeek — that really sounds phony.)

2nd Job Applicant: "I think my weak spot for this job is my computer ability. That's why I signed up for a class last week. I should be up to speed by the time the job starts." (That's a good answer.)

What would you do if ... The employer is checking to see how closely your solutions match their policies and what kind of a problem-solver you would be.

Strategy: Don't box yourself in! Start your answer with, "I'd need to know more about

company policies, but one thing I might do..." Try to sound decisive, but not rigid.

What kind of salary are you asking for? Careful! This is a "screening" question — your answer could lose the job for you.

Strategy: Try to avoid a full answer at this point. You can say:

"I'd like to learn more about the job, but I can tell you that I'll be very flexible."

or

"I'm very interested in this company and I know your wages are about average for the industry. That's fine for me."

If you have to give a figure, give a range, such as:

"I'd be interested in something in the 20s."

Remember: The place to really discuss salary is after they've offered you the job. Then you have their full attention. See Step 10 for more information.

You seem too experienced for this job... or **This job requires travel and that's hard on families...** or **We need our people to be very fit physically, and to fit a certain image...** All of these questions border on being illegal, and they hint of age bias, parent bias, or size/ability bias.

Strategy: Do not jump to conclusions. Stay focused on the job and answer accordingly. For example:

"I'm very aware of the physical requirements on this job and I can assure you I'm able to meet them. In fact, this work uses skills I use in my hobby, which is weightlifting..."

You get the idea. Prove the assumption wrong, but don't get angry. For more ideas on handling age-related questions, read the book ***Job Search over 40*** in the Pocket Job Series.

Closing — The closing is a counterpart of the greeting. This is your chance to leave the employer with a good impression.

To make a good closing you should:

- Smile, make eye contact, shake hands.
- Repeat the interviewer's name and thank them.
- Ask for the job. Example: "I'm very interested in this job and I'd like to work for your company."
- Ask for the timeline: "When will you be making a decision?" or "What is the next step in the process?"
- Settle on a definite time or day for the next contact. Example: "I'd like to call you next Monday to see how it's going and answer any questions you may have. Is the afternoon a good time?"
- Thank them again.
- Walk out with good posture and a firm step.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

STEP 9. Following up

It isn't over until it's over. You can repair a bad interview or build on a good one by using good follow-up techniques. Your first step is to write a brief thank-you letter and mail it within 24 hours of the interview. For more information on thank-you letters, see ***Resumes Etc.*** in the Pocket Job Series.

Within a week of the interview, call the employer. In this conversation, re-introduce yourself, then ask if they're ready to schedule a second interview. Let them know that you truly want the job.

Two weeks after the interview, call again. Ask if there's anything more you can tell them to help in the decision-making process.

Three weeks after the interview, send a brief follow-up letter that repeats one or two of your best points, as related to the job. If you've taken a new class or learned a

new skill, put that in the letter. State that you're very interested in the job.

Continue your follow-up by alternating between calls or letters each week. Be brief and polite. You want them to believe you're interested, but you don't want to be a pest.

How important is follow-up? Extremely important. Several studies show that employers are impressed by persistence and that very few job-seekers follow up after an interview.

When should you stop your follow-up? When you lose interest in the job. If you receive a rejection letter, feel free to call or write in a month or two. The job may still be open and you may look like a perfect fit with the passage of time. This happens more often than you'd expect. For more information on follow-up, read ***Five Steps to Your Next Job*** in the Pocket Job Series.

STEP 10. Negotiating the offer

Congratulations! You did it. You impressed the employer enough to win the job! Now there's just one step left: negotiate the offer. It's easy to let this go, but you shouldn't. You'll never have a better chance to work out a good deal with the boss.

First you need to know what you can negotiate for. Here are a few things the employer might consider.

__ salary
__ number of hours per week
__ flexible scheduling or shifts
__ equipment and tools
__ training; tuition reimbursement
__ health care benefits
__ vacation
__ sick days
__ personal leave days
__ company car
__ pension
__ review schedule, raises, promotions

Before you can negotiate, you need to know your own bottom line and what you can afford. Use the checklist above as a guide. Mark with a 1 the things that are very important. Use a 2 for the things that are less important, and a 3 for the things you don't really care about.

Now look at the items marked 1. Use a separate piece of paper to decide your limits. What's the lowest salary you can take? What salary do you want? What health care package do you need?

Remember that negotiating is a give-and-take process. Is there anything on that list you can "give back" to the employer? For example, some workers receive health coverage through their spouses' employers. If you don't need the employer's coverage, you may be saving them some money. If you bring this up, the employer may feel more free to meet your other requests.

Now you know your side of the story — it's time to hear from the employer. When they

offer you the job, it may be in a phone call, in the interview, or through the mail. Your first response should be cautious enthusiasm. For example:

"That's terrific! I can't wait to get started. Can you tell me more about the salary and benefits?"

Take careful notes and doublecheck them. Then ask for time to consider the offer. Even a day will help. You need time to think about the offer, to look at your budget, to think about a counter-offer, to talk to your spouse, etc.

Note: Don't worry about asking for a day or the weekend to consider the offer. It's very common to do this. If the employer insists on an answer this minute, beware! Why is he or she in such a rush? Won't the job be there in 24 hours?

After you've thought about the offer and your counter-offer, call the employer on the phone. It's often easier to negotiate on the phone because you don't have to worry

about your facial expressions, and you're not in their "territory" — in their office. But if you'd rather meet in person, use the phone to set a time.

When you discuss the offer, try an opening like this:

"I'm really excited about this job, and I'd like to accept the offer. There's just a couple of things I want to discuss. After looking over my budget, I believe it will be hard to get by on $23,000. I'd like to build in a raise to $25,000 after six months. I'm also hoping to get a week's vacation after six months. What do you think?"

Keep the conversation flowing, and be ready to compromise — but not too much. Don't take the job if you can't afford to!

When you have settled the arrangements, put them in a brief letter of agreement. The letter might say something like this:

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am happy to accept the position of shop supervisor at Atlas Company.

To confirm our conversation of yesterday, I will start at $23,000 with a raise to $25,000 in six months. I will also get one week's vacation in six months. The rest of my employment package matches the standard package for Atlas Company.

I'm really looking forward to starting. I'll see you Monday.

Sincerely,

Martha Smith

Martha Smith

This isn't a contract, but it's a good precaution. If Ms. Jones were to "forget" the terms of the agreement (or be transferred to another division, for example), there would be a record of your agreement. Be sure to keep a copy for your files at home.

Chapter THREE

Sure-hire tips for the interview

No matter what the job is, or what type of interview you have, there are some tricks that will help you to do well. Some of these tips have been discussed earlier, but they're worth repeating.

Body Language

Posture — Stand as straight as you can, and keep your shoulders straight. When seated, sit back in the chair, but don't lounge. Keep your head straight, not tilted to one side. Hold your hands in your lap, or put a notebook in your lap to write on. Cross your legs if you must, but practice first in front of a mirror — do your pant legs ride up and expose bare calf? Does your skirt stretch across your knees? If it doesn't look right, don't cross your legs. It's really better to keep your feet flat on the floor anyway.

These tips about posture will give you a more confident, stable appearance.

Facial expressions — When in doubt, smile slightly. Practice in front of a mirror so you know what your "at rest" face looks like. If you tend to frown, concentrate on smiling. On the other hand, if you smile a lot, try to look a little more serious.

Gestures — Keep your hand gestures to a minimum. People tend to use their hands more when they're nervous. You don't want to look like a windmill while you're answering a question!

Eye contact — Yes! Do make eye contact. There are cultural variations, but in America, most people don't trust people who won't look them in the eye. But don't stare either. Practice with a partner or counselor until you have a good balance of eye contact and looking away.

Handshake — Give the employer an opportunity to offer his or her hand. If they don't, offer yours. A handshake is an important sign of respect and trust and is a part of

doing business. Practice with a friend or counselor until you're sure your handshake is firm and brief.

Answering Questions

You will out-perform other applicants if you keep these tips in mind. Practice them until they are second nature.

What is the real question? — Always ask yourself why the employer has asked a particular question. This is especially important when dealing with your weaknesses, or issues such as your age or other "unaskable" questions. Here's an example:

Interviewer: "Do you have young children at home?"

1st Job Applicant: "Yes, they're 3, 5, and 6. They're really good kids. They hardly ever call me at work or get sick. And when they do, I can usually handle it on the phone."

2nd Job Applicant: (thinking) Hmmm... why did he ask that? He doesn't really care about my kids ... and besides, that's an ille-

gal question... (Answering) "I know you're wondering if I'll have problems concentrating or getting here on time. The office will really be depending on me in this job. In my last job I won the punctuality award three months in a row. And I only took two of my 10 sick days last year. I'm a very reliable, punctual worker. That's important to me. And I know it's important in this job. That's why I think I'm such a good fit for this position."

Well done! Notice how calm she was? Answering the real question — will your kids get in the way of the job — helped her save a potentially bad moment in the interview. It's still an illegal question, but she would have gained very little by pointing that out to the interviewer.

Pause — Don't feel rushed to answer. It's fine to pause a moment before talking. This gives you time to collect your thoughts and give a more complete answer. It also keeps you from answering out of anger or surprise.

No, but ... — Never answer a question by

saying only "no." That blocks the conversation. It is also a waste: you have a chance to talk and that's how you use it? Here's an example:

Interviewer: "Have you ever taken phone orders before?"

1st Job Applicant: "No, I haven't."

2nd Job Applicant: "No, but I've used the phone to solve customer complaints, and I've filled orders through the mail. I'm sure I can combine the two skills and do a good job filling phone orders for you."

Neither applicant has filled phone orders before, but Applicant Two made it clear she could learn. Don't make the interviewer drag information out of you. Use every opportunity to tell them something positive about you. If you practice saying "but" each time you say "no," you'll remember this rule.

Yes, and... — You guessed it. Never answer a question by saying only "yes." That's really frustrating for the interviewer. For example:

Interviewer: "I see on your resume that you did shipping and receiving for ABC Company. That must mean you used the computer to track orders."

1st Job Applicant: "Yes, I did."

2nd Job Applicant: "Yes, and I really got to enjoy it. They used a special program that they wrote, but I understand it's not too different from the one you use here. As a matter of fact, I got good enough to train other people on the system. I think I'll pick up on your system pretty quickly."

Wouldn't you rather hire Applicant Two? He made the interviewer's job easier by giving extra information. Practice saying "and" each time you say "yes," and you'll remember to give more detail in your answers.

Relate each answer to the job — The employer only cares about hiring someone to fill this position. Don't go on and on about yourself or past employers. Instead, use each answer as an opportunity to show how you can fill their position — and solve

their problem. That's why research is so important. You need to know what their problem is before you can offer to solve it.

Ask Questions

Why? Because you want the answers, of course. But also because you want to show interest in the job. You want the employer to know you're interested and that you've really prepared for this interview. And your questions will give you the information you need to decide about taking the job.

Be Friendly!

Remember the only iron-clad rule of interviewing: ***People hire people they like.*** Or at least, ***people don't hire people they don't like.***

Give the interviewer a chance to like you. Show your personality and your interest in the job. Treat them like a future friend and co-worker and they just might become those things.

Chapter FOUR

Increase your chances

GET MORE INTERVIEWS

Nearly all job offers come during or after an interview — never before! (If you get an offer from someone you haven't met in person, be careful.)

The best way to increase your chances of an offer is to increase the number of interviews you have. Your odds will improve for two reasons: because you have more chances at an offer, and because you will get better at interviewing.

So... if you're serious about getting a job, get serious about getting interviews. For more information on getting interviews, read ***Five Steps to Your Next Job*** in the Pocket Job Series.

On the next page you'll find a list of the 10 steps for interview success. Review each step before each interview and you will be employed in no time. **Good luck!**

10 STEPS TO INTERVIEW SUCCESS

Before the Interview

1. Research the company
2. Identify your weaknesses
3. Prepare questions and answers
4. Practice
5. Prepare for the meeting

At the Interview

6. Wait for the interviewer
7. Meet the interviewer (greeting and warmup)
8. Handle the interview (questions/answers, closing)

After the Interview

9. Follow up
10. Negotiate the offer

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Helpful books for job-seekers

From the *Pocket Job Series*, Prototype Career Press

Five Steps to Your Next Job
Resumes Etc.
Cracking the Hidden Job Market
Job Search over 40: Selling to your Strengths
Financial Survival between Jobs

Other helpful books:

101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions, Ron Fry, Career Press
Make Your Job Interview a Success, J.I. Biegeleisen, ARCO
Resumes Don't Get Jobs: The realities and myths of job hunting, Bob Weinstein, McGraw-Hill
Sweaty Palms: The neglected art of being interviewed, Anthony Medley, Ten Speed Press

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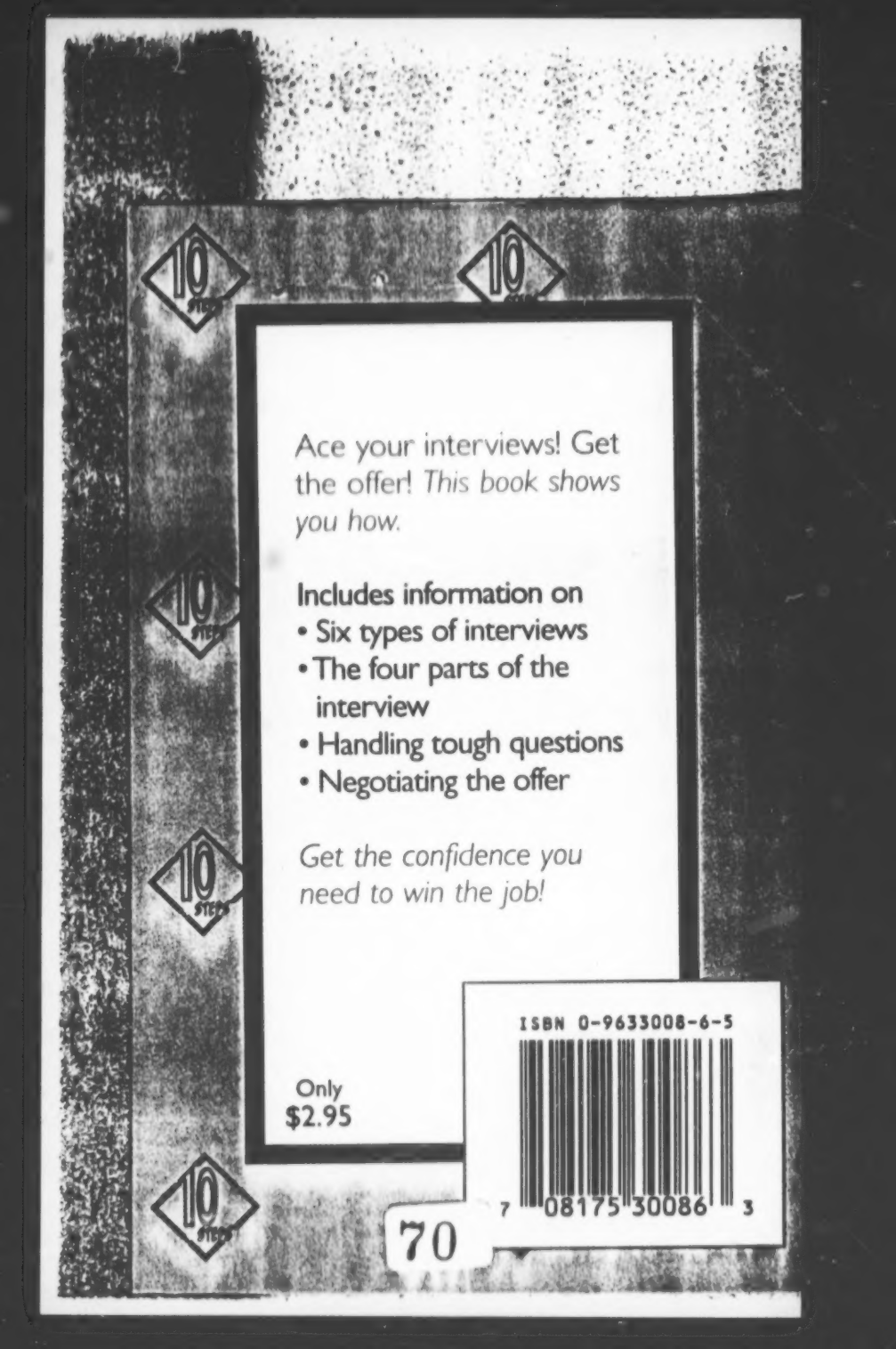
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